

# INTERCONNECT update



The Hitaltech Newsletter

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## Andy says...

This, you might think, is a little old school. A newsletter in hard copy? Really?

We haven't done a newsletter for a very long time, but if the past few months have shown us anything it's that a) the relationships we have with our customers is more important than ever, and b) now that most of us spend

half our lives in Zoom meetings, the chance to get away from your screen for a second is always welcome. So we wanted to connect – and we decided to do it the old-fashioned way.

Mind you, that's the last old-fashioned thing about this issue. Inside you'll find help to choose between our flexible and brand new rigid board to board connectors. You'll discover how our Value Added Services are helping you deliver extra quality and efficiency. And you'll find out why our Accounts Manager Tracy was dancing the Hokey Cokey in her local Spar shop car park.

We hope you like what's here. And if you need a hand with your connectors and enclosures, do give us a call.

Stay well.



Andy Fitzer - Hitaltech MD

## Add Value To Your Component Sourcing

Discover new ways to reduce costs, improve quality and develop better-realised products.

For more than 30 years, Hitaltech has helped organisations deliver better quality products whilst removing much of the time, cost and compromise from product development.



Now, our added value electronics sourcing service enables you to tailor the service you receive, helping you reduce costs, improve quality and develop better-realised products.

*"There's no one size fits all way to improve*

*production efficiency,"* explains Hitaltech MD Andy Fitzer. *"Improvements happen across the production process and are different for every organisation. With Added Value Services, we're helping manufacturers find new efficiencies in ways that work for them."*

The 'menu' of services includes:

**Buffer stock packages**, where we carry stock so you don't have to. It's a service that has made Just in Time processes simpler for countless customers.

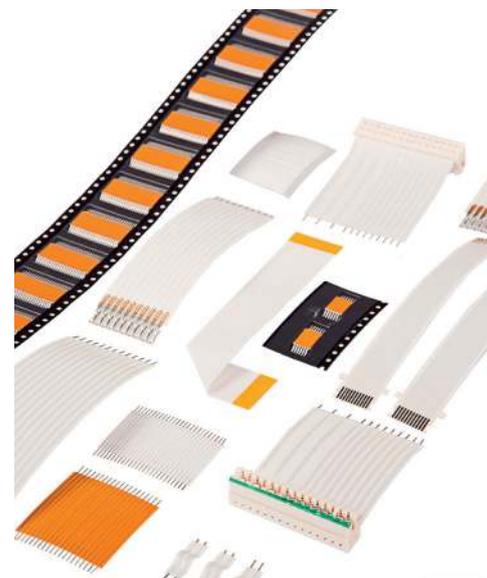
**Kitting** lets you create your own pre-packed component kits with unique parts numbers. With just one part number from one supplier, ordering and assembly is quicker and easier.

Our **wiring loom assembly** service cuts the cost of production and the risk of rework by delivering wiring looms ready for installation.

**Machined enclosures** place cut-outs exactly where you need them while **mould modifications** enable you to add inserts to enclosures so they deliver all the functionality and aesthetics required. And with the **mechanical assembly service**, you can reduce time and cost by receiving components in assembled or semi-assembled state.

**Component printing** means no more costly, laborious product labels. Colours, diagrams and legends are printed directly onto the component, saving time and money in assembly, reducing production errors and removing third party print costs.

*"The true value of a component is not simply in the thing itself,"* explains Andy. *"It is in the time it saves, the processes it accelerates and the contribution it makes to the end product. Our value-added approach to electronics sourcing ensures our components deliver in many more ways than one."*



### WHAT'S INSIDE THIS ISSUE

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# Rigid Or Flexible? Which Is The Right Choice For You?

## We explore the board to board connector decision-making process.

If you're using multiple PCBs, there's usually a right time to choose one option over the other. Making that decision involves weighing the technical needs of the product, the functionality and the production implications against the distinct benefits of the two connector types.

### The benefits of rigid

Rigid systems:

- Offer multiple connection points for transferring signal and power from one PCB to another
- Can be used for mechanical as well as electrical connection
- Are ideal when PCBs are stacked one on top of the other or parallel
- Can be supplied in ultra-fine pitches and multiple rows giving a large number of connection points in a dense footprint.
- Usually operate over relatively short distances and are often pluggable using a male and female arrangement
- Are offered in conventional through hole format for manual insertion and SMD options for automatic pick and place and reflow soldering
- Can be assembled separately before PCBs are plugged together at box build stage
- Allow a modular approach enabling you to add optional daughter boards
- Can be supplied with gold plated contacts for low signal transfer

### The benefits of flexible

Flexible systems:

- Can be integrated into multiple PCBs assembled in a panel, which can then be broken out and folded into the desired position
- Can be used to connect PCBs over a longer distance than is possible with a rigid system and can be permanently soldered or plugged using FFC connectors
- Can be used in complex geometries, connecting PCBs which are not aligned
- Can be used for both signal and power applications up to 12 Ampere per conductor
- Are desirable when the PCBs to be connected are subjected to vibration
- Are available in conventional through-hole or SMD packages for automatic pick and place or reflow soldering

### Is price a determining factor?

Price, in terms of the individual component cost, is rarely likely to be a deciding factor. But price does become relevant when considering ongoing functionality and production costs. As the points above demonstrate, rigid or flexible

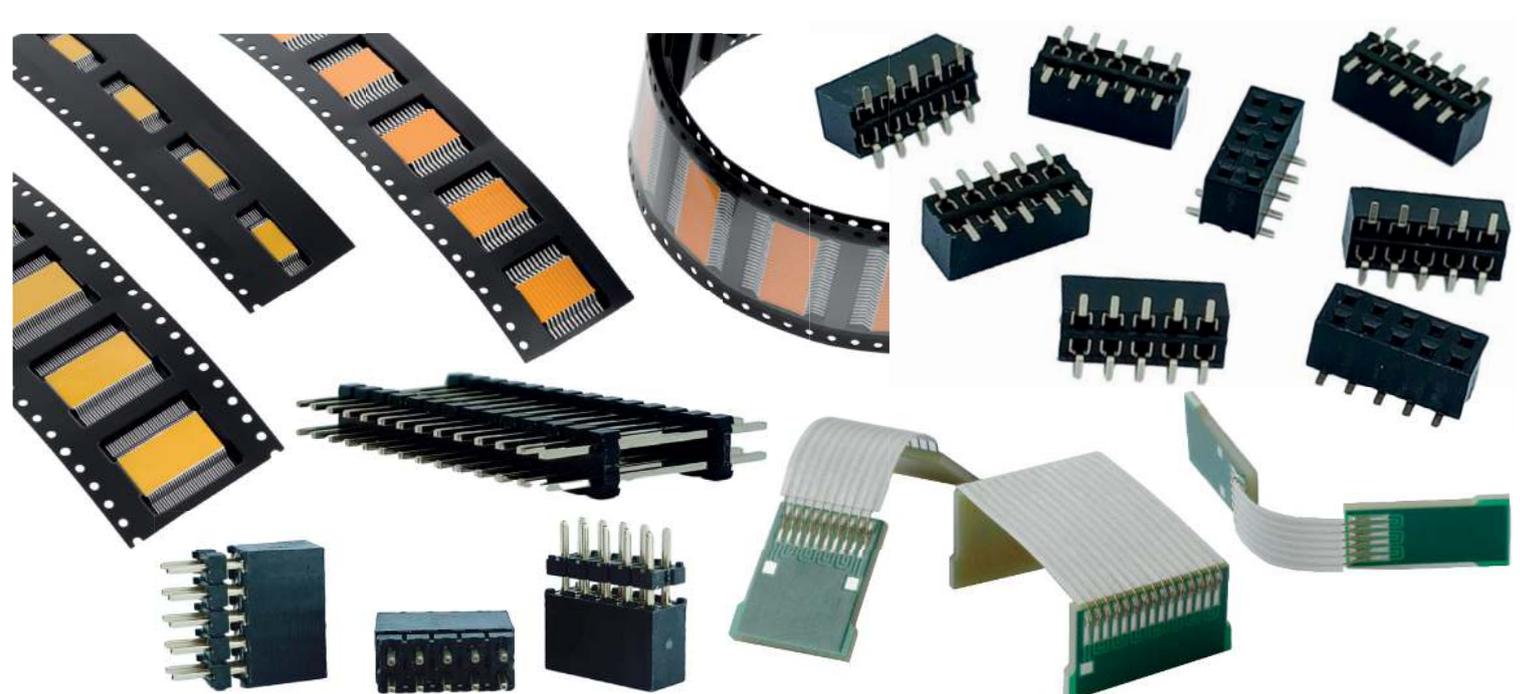
can both offer advantages. The key to cost-effective design, and potentially to ongoing reliability, functionality, longevity and ease of use is marrying the right connector type with the right product.

### The best of both worlds

Hitaltech's introduction of rigid board to board connectors to its Conex-it range comes some years after the introduction of our flexible systems. Rigid connectors are certainly not new, but offering both types enables our customers to find every option in one place – something that remains rare within the electronics industry.

That choice and flexibility extends to production processes too, with products that can either be through-hole or reflow soldered. And our new SMD R adds even greater choice in terms of bridging lengths for automatic production processes.

Simplification. Flexibility. Options. They're key to making manufacturing more cost effective. And now they're also at the heart of what Hitaltech does. So whatever the connector, we're now your one-stop shop. Talk to us about the right connectors for your application now.



# Going With The Flow

Our enclosures have been part of Schneider's Mk I telemetry stations for 10 years. So as the company geared up to launch its Mk II system to the water industry, what made it continue its relationship with Hitaltech?



Schneider manufactures telemetry stations, predominantly for the water industry. There may be dozens of units dotted around water company sites, operating locally and independently or joined up to form a much larger network. The units perform many tasks, including monitoring flow rates in rivers and reservoir levels, feeding information to control rooms, and making significant independent decisions like opening sluice gates.

"Our units are sophisticated and intelligent," explains Ian Campbell, Purchasing Manager, Schneider Electric Systems UK. "They are intelligent enough to do something about the situations they encounter."

## The Mk I enclosure

A decade ago, Hitaltech worked with Schneider to create the first iteration of the telemetry station. The enclosure Hitaltech designed and manufactured housed functions for alarm analysis, archive data logging and local control applications. Then, for isolated and unmanned sites, we created the enclosure for a more compact field device that proved especially valuable for small footprint, low power telemetry applications.

## Developing Mk II

When the time came to start work on the Mk II station, Schneider performed due diligence to ensure Hitaltech remained the right development partner.

"We did look at alternative suppliers," Ian confirms, "but the suitability of the Hitaltech housing for our application - the form and fit - is excellent. We evaluated it against many of Hitaltech's competitors and found it to be the most suitable."

Just as important as the suitability of the housing was the suitability of the supplier. "It's important to work with a company who will support you at every stage, from prototyping into full production, and Hitaltech have certainly done that. The level of support is genuinely very, very good."

## Customisation and printing

"You could never buy this as a standard item - it's customised for our needs," explains Ian. "We take the standard housing, then it's machined to our specifications. The fact that they can also do the printing means we have to put a lot less stickers on each unit - saving on the cost of materials and labour. We've taken a lot of stickers off as part of the redesign but there are some labels - like CE marks - that won't change. As most of our

labels are permanent, printing is the cheaper and quicker option. So the customisation has enabled us to reduce costs as well as improve aesthetics."

"The finished product is very adaptable. It's DIN rail mountable too, ergonomically very good, easy to modify and it looks good. Delivery deadlines are excellent. Nine times out of ten they beat the delivery deadline we give them, and we've been putting them under a lot of pressure to deliver. Hitaltech's delivery performance has allowed us to achieve significant milestones in the release of the product."

## Working with Hitaltech

Ten years after Schneider first started working with Hitaltech, and two years after work began on the Mk II telemetry outstation, why does Ian believe the relationship remains as strong as ever?

"I've been outsourcing products for over 20 years," he says. "You know you've found a good supplier when they will go the extra mile and genuinely work with you. They are as committed to the product as we are."

If the product is successful and the cost, design and end product are right, then everybody benefits. That's the way Hitaltech works.

"I wouldn't hesitate to recommend them."



# Reflections On Southern Manufacturing & Electronics 2020

Matt Hughes looks back at another successful expo at Farnborough.

Remember those halcyon days when you could fill an exhibition hall with people and no one had to worry about social distancing? It seems an age ago now but Southern Manufacturing & Electronics was only in February, and once again it was attended by thousands of visitors with an interest in assembly systems, automation & robotics, and test & inspection systems.

Hitaltech was there, proudly demonstrating the new range of Conex-it rigid board-to-board interconnect products which now sits alongside our flexible board-to-board offering. Also on display were our full range of



wire-to-board PCB mounted terminal blocks and connectors, customisable enclosures and our value added services – many of which are now taken in one form or another by an increasing number of our customers.

What struck me about this year's event was the sheer number and quality of conversations we had over the three-day event and generally how busy it was. Just like previous years, February's show was preceded by a storm – this year's was Ciara - leaving me wondering how this would impact the overall attendance figures. I needn't have worried. We enjoyed another strong turnout over the three days and generated some excellent opportunities, a great relief for us considering all the work that is involved in planning and organising this kind of event.

Our other big show of the year, EDS, has now unfortunately been postponed until March 31st - April 1st 2021 because of COVID-19. I think most people would agree that this is going to remain a year of disruption, but once events resume we're looking forward to getting out again and meeting our clients.

In the meantime, Hitaltech wishes all our customers and their families well during these unprecedented times and we'll see you 'live' in 2021 when I'm sure things will bounce back bigger and better than ever.

# Tracy's £1,200 Dance Marathon

Hitaltech Accounts Manager Tracy Rimmer was all set to take part in her local hospice's biggest fundraiser when the pandemic locked us all down. But it didn't stop Tracy (and her daughter) from raising much needed funds.

St Catherine's Hospice holds a place in the heart of many people in Lancashire. Its team cares for patients and families across Chorley, Preston and South Ribble who are affected by life-shortening conditions like cancer, motor neurone disease and heart failure. St Catherine's is a charity and, like many charities, the arrival of coronavirus has seen donations dry up.

## Dance party

Tracy had been due to take part in the hospice's biggest fundraiser, the Moonlight &

Memories Walk, but it had been put on hold. Yet Tracy still wanted to help. So, with more than a little support from daughter Melissa, Tracy cordoned off a corner of her local Spar store's car park, and together, Tracy and Melissa spent a day in a non-stop party marathon, singing and dancing along to the Hokey Cokey, The Wheels On the Bus and lots more earworms.

By the end of the day, mum and daughter had raised an incredible £1,000.

*"We had so much fun," said Tracy. "We had a brilliant day. The customers were fantastic (and so generous it brought tears to my eyes) and Melissa and I created some really lovely memories together."*

## Doubling up

It's a great story, but Tracy was a little reluctant for this article to appear in the newsletter with her image attached.

*"I'm not shy," she protests, "I just like to stay in the background."*

So Hitaltech offered a little extra encouragement: if Tracy agreed to her picture appearing in this article, the company would double their donation to her fundraising efforts. Which is why £1,200 is now on its way to St Catherine's.

*"It's just a wonderful effort isn't it?" said*

Hitaltech MD Andy Fitzer. *"We're really proud of what Tracy and Melissa did, and we were only too happy to support her."*



# Meet The Team - Stephanie Santoro



If you've chatted to Hitaltech at an event or expo in the past couple of years, then we will have marketing executive Stephanie Santoro to thank for the experience. Part of the Hitaltech family for more than seven years, here Steph talks about her career to date, her role, and just what's involved in prepping Hitaltech's attendance at those exhibitions.

## Where are you from?

Blackpool

## What three words would you use to describe yourself?

Hard working, professional and reliable

## How did you get started with Hitaltech?

I actually started in the sales administration role which I did for 5 years before moving into marketing. When I started marketing I had zero experience so it was really nice the company trusted me and gave me the opportunity to learn on the job and grow into it. In 2 and a half years I have learnt so much - and I've come to love the marketing role.

## What does your job entail?

I oversee and develop marketing campaigns for our products and services. I also maintain our websites, databases and customer relationship management (CRM) system and I use data analytics to monitor our performance. Conducting market research to explore how we're meeting our customers' needs - and to identify potential new customers - is a big part of the job, as is organising events and product exhibitions.

## Tell us about the work that goes into prepping for an event or exhibition

We are regular attendees at a number of events each year such as Southern Manufacturing & Electronics and The Engineering Design Show. We book the stand for each show a year in advance, which gives me enough time to book accommodation, organise furniture hire, source promotional items and arrange for any new samples to be sent from our suppliers. As we are regulars at the exhibitions our customers are usually

aware they will see us there - many let us know in advance that they would like to talk something over with us at the expo - but about 4 months before the exhibition we start promoting in the press and on social media. That's my favourite part of the job as it gives me a chance to engage with our customers (and possible new customers).

## Why are customers choosing Hitaltech over its competitors?

Hitaltech have a great reputation not only because of the extensive knowledge of the market but because we are good at problem solving. With our expertise we advise our customers from initial concept, through the design stage and on to production. We also offer a wide range of value added services such as digital printing, component kitting and buffer stock packages which has helped current customers save time and money by having one supplier who can do it all.

## How's lockdown been for you?

I have been working from home, and as I have 2 young boys it has sometimes been a challenge to juggle work, home schooling and running around after a one year old but Hitaltech have been great and very understanding, which makes me feel more relaxed about working from home.

## What do you like to do when you aren't working?

When I am not working I focus my time on my husband and our 2 boys. We have 1 day a week where we do something fun together. That's what I'm looking forward to the most as lockdown lifts!

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